1986

Three Seasons With Fahrenheit 451

George Bluestone

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On November 11, 1985 the Rycenga Lecture Series, sponsored by the Department of English, the Convocation Committee, and the Student Government of Sacred Heart University, presented a screening of Fahrenheit 451, *Francois Truffaut's adaptation of Ray Bradbury's science fiction novel about a future world in which books are not only banned but burned. (Bradbury's title comes from the temperature at which book paper catches fire.) Following the film, George Bluestone, a filmmaker, writer, and critic currently teaching at Boston University, delivered a lecture on "Technological Futopianism and* Fahrenheit 451 *" and led a discussion on issues raised not only by Bradbury and Truffaut but also by a variety of other artists and social analysts concerned with the impact of technology on modern life and art. The following is an edited transcript of Professor Bluestone's talk and his responses to questions from the audience.*

Heraclitus said, "You never enter the same river twice." In a certain sense I have never seen the same film twice . Each viewing contains the history of past viewings which affect current perception. I was privileged to follow Truffaut around while he was shooting *Fahrenheit 451* at Pinewood Studios in Iver Heath, England. I have had three seasons with this film. The first season was the experience of watching Truffaut shoot in the studio and on location. In the heat of production, I was privy to his comments on the many changes he had made not only in Ray Bradbury's novel but also in the shooting script Truffaut co-authored with Jean-Louis Richard. After observing the shoot, I worked out some ideas on the psychoanalysis of fire, the meaning of the fire itself, in a piece published in *Film Quarterly* (Summer 1967, pp. 3-10). I see some of you have xeroxed copies, so I won't repeat what I said in that. I would like to talk a little more about my second and third seasons with *Fahrenheit 451*.

Before I do that, I want to recall some of the things I said about

Truffaut's intentions. Truffaut had said that he wanted to make a film *about the future slightly removed: not a tale as in the Bradbury novel* of a future far in the distance (so that book burning and the destruction of literary culture might seem improbable), but a time and events that would seem credible now. To serve that intention, Truffaut removed much of the science fiction gadgetry from Ray Bradbury's novel. Some of you who have looked at the book will remember for example the mechanical dog with the poisonous proboscis who goes chasing after the fugitives who escape along the railroad tracks. The only remnant of that kind of science fiction device is the searchers with their one-man jets. They are presented almost absurdly, as though Truffaut were spoofing science fiction conventions. The scene is an obvious process shot, almost laughable in this golden age of special effects. Truffaut didn't pay much attention to it because his focus was elsewhere. He was trying to do something different from formula science fiction. He was trying to stay close to the theme of literary culture's affective humanity.

Recall that in the film Truffaut has Clarisse appear among the railroad people. Those of you who remember the book will know that Clarisse disappears about a third of the way through the novel. It's as though, in Bradbury, Montag's learning to read *David Copperfield* and to become an underground fugitive displaces his erotic attachment to Clarisse. In the film there is a scene where narcissistic passengers on the monorail stroke their fur and kiss their images in the window. Later you see a man embracing himself in the park in the scene where the child is discovered with the "forbidden" miniature text. These are all erotic distortions, like Linda's sublimation through video and drugs. Jean-Louis Richard's screenplay originally called for additional devices associated with ecological pessimism: he wanted to have the passengers on the monorail descend the ladder wearing those little air masks, the anti-smog masks one sees people wearing in Japan. Truffaut thought about these devices and decided against them. He wanted to stick very closely to the affective nature of the books themselves. He got rid of every science fiction device that deviated from this central thread. By placing Clarisse among the "talking books," Truffaut underlined his concern with the survival of his humanistic subversives.

A flare-up during the shooting at Pinewood emphasized this

intention. The original script retained a scene from the novel where Clarisse tells Montag that if you rub a buttercup on your chin and the yellow comes away, it means that you are in love. Jean-Louis Richard retained that scene, but during the shooting Truffaut decided to leave it out, apparently because he wanted to center on the issue of literary humanism as a felt experience. A love story would have gotten in the way. Oskar Werner was very disturbed by Truffaut's decision to drop the buttercup scene because in the character of Montag he felt the natural attraction to Julie Christie's Clarisse. What actor in his right mind wouldn't be attracted to Julie Christie? She was a very lovely, intelligent, and decent actress, one of the nicest I've ever met. Montag, or Oskar Werner as Montag, wanted a genuine transfer of the affection he felt for David Copperfield to Clarisse, the inadvertent rebel. He wanted that feeling to develop when he found Clarisse among the fugitives. But Truffaut was adamant. He wanted no deflection from the book-people. They lost a half a day's shooting arguing the point. Oskar Werner issued an ultimatum: "I'm not going to go on with the next scene until I can do the love scene." And Truffaut said, "If you don't want to shoot it my way, we won't shoot today." And he went off to his trailer and sat around reading a book for awhile. Finally, Werner, feeling that he might be held responsible for chewing up a lot of money and wasting valuable shooting time, conceded, "All right, we'll do it your way." Truffaut was very quiet, but very strong-willed. Appearances were deceptive. Often seeming diffident and shy, Truffaut was always in absolute control of his film. He was a very authoritative director. That's why he was marvelous with actors.

Another interesting incident from my first season with *Fahrenheit 451* occurred when they were shooting the "talking books" along the railroad tracks. The production schedule ran from February, 1966, to almost the end of March, and on the day when they were supposed to shoot the scene in the woods, lo and behold it snowed. Very unseasonal for England. It never snows in England in March. It hardly ever snows in England! And here was this unscheduled snowstorm suddenly descending on the woods outside Pinewood Studios. Truffaut seemed not to hesitate at all. He said, "Shoot it in the snow." The result was one of the most beautiful scenes in the film. Later, Truffaut edited in the line from Robert Louis Stevenson's *The*

Master of Ballantrae: "And I remember that I will value my death on the day that it snows." He edited that in very skillfully, but originally that line wasn't supposed to be rendered in a real snowstorm. Truffaut's ability to take advantage of serendipity, of accidents in the weather, was a sign of his talent.

Of course, one of the reasons it is difficult for me to watch this film now is that, as you know, last year Truffaut died on a Saturday of a heart attack in Paris, and Oskar Werner died of a heart attack in Vienna the following day. It was just one of those extraordinary coincidences. Seeing the film today has a poignant edge for me. The work seems like a memorial to two great talents who were taken in their prime.

When the film came out it was not very well received by critics. They were expecting the charm, wit, and playfulness of Truffaut's "Antoine Doneil" films, the lightness of *Shoot the Piano Player, 400 Blows, Stolen Kisses, Day for Night.* Critics felt *Fahrenheit 451* was too solemn; that it sacrificed too much of Ray Bradbury's science fiction apparatus; that Truffaut couldn't hear the dissonance of voices among his international cast; that Werner and Anton Diffring did not blend and dovetail nicely with the British cadences of Cyril Cusack and Julie Christie. But looking at the film from our perspective, I would say these flaws do not seem to matter much. I think there are several reasons for this. One, the film has been rediscovered as critics have tried to "place" it in the corpus of Truffaut's work (see Gerald Peary's reappraisal in Danny Peary's *Screen Flights, Screen Fantasies*). One of the more interesting studies to come out in recent years, and dealing in some detail with Bradbury's tale, is Annette Insdorf's little book on Truffaut which she did for the Twayne series. Insdorf explores many of the things I began to suggest in the original *Film Quarterly* article. She observes how Truffaut personalizes the books, so that you almost feel, when Bea Duffle as the old woman who dies with her books strikes the fatal match, that a whole community is dying. The way Truffaut had Nicholas Roeg shoot the burning books, the way they curl up and expire, suggests the fatality of burning flesh. Of course the scene echoes deeply embedded images of Nazi book burning. Nobody can see this film without the cultural memory of Nazi book burning rituals. Nobody who sees this film can divest himself completely of

memories of the Inquisition, burning witches at the stake, burning dissidents. All of that is working powerfully in the film.

Another reason the film doesn't seem dated to me is that what began as a kind of prophecy has become a realistic documentary. When Truffaut had the wall-sized video screen installed in Linda's house, it was a new thing. All we knew was the little 19-inch box. The Advent screen had not yet been invented. Now every bar has an Advent screen. Now we show 3/4-inch cassettes on a big Sony screen. Now there are prototypes of full wall models which use silicone surfaces, flat screens, without any tubes behind them. So Linda's video wall (remember, she was hoping to have a second one) has gone from prophecy to yesterday's headlines. We have also lived to see the Valium revolution sweep the country. Nobody thinks anything of taking Valium or Seconal to calm down or handle tension, and everyone is familiar with the way one can hold experience at a distance by sinking oneself passively into television. Pop a pill, get your mind off your troubles. We are a nation of Lindas.

The little game of interactive video, "Come Play With Me," was a futuristic fantasy when the film appeared. Now we have the QUBE experiment in Columbus, Ohio. The audience is involved in the system either by voting for a program, or voting positively or negatively on a current issue. More recently, interactive video has experimented with viewer control of "branch narratives." You begin a film, and the viewer decides who is going to be the murderer — the butler, or the son-in-law, or the gardener. He pushes that button, and his choice has consequences for the "branch narrative." The viewer is not inventing completely, but he is, working against the grain of passive viewing, controlling the narrative as it goes along. When Linda is asked a dumb question by the guys on the screen — "Shall we put Miriam in the twelfth seat?" — she is so flustered and excited she can hardly answer. When the film appeared, interactive video was an original idea. Now it is commonplace. It's almost as though the QUBE experimenters in Columbus, Ohio saw this film, and decided to go ahead with their system. To cite another example, the monorail was a brand new phenomenon in Paris when Truffaut shot *Fahrenheit 451*. Now you go to Disneyland and the monorail is routine transportation. What seemed like science fiction twenty years ago has

become part of our landscape. For all these reasons the film doesn't feel dated.

If my first season with *Fahrenheit 451* was observing production, and the second was my response when the film first came out, my third season emerged when I developed a course in "Cinema and Technology" at Boston University. We had been hearing a good deal of discussion about how the computer revolution was going to save us. We were reading influential studies like Alvin Toffler's *The Third Wave* which had pulled together many of the things we knew impressionistically but had not encapsulated into a coherent design. Following the millenarian, or utopian tradition, Toffler argued that there were three great movements in technological history: the preindustrial or agrarian movement which influenced our earliest methods of social organization; the Industrial Revolution which brought production into factories and removed our habitats from our places of work; and now we had entered the "third wave," the Information Revolution.

Toffler and technological observers like him took this revolution seriously and tried to anticipate the effects it will have on social organization. They seemed to be telling us, "Don't be disturbed by the apparent disorder of the computer takeover. Don't feel stupid because you can't operate a word processor or develop a program for your IBM PC. Relax, what you are witnessing is another wave of reorganization in the means of production. It's going to do us far more good than harm." Toffler, as you know, predicted that the computer would return post-industrial society to the smaller, more modest and supposedly moe attractive world of cottage industries. We will once again live where we work. If you can have a computer in your house that does your market research for you (and generally allows you to work at home), pays your bills, does your banking, draws your plans if you are an engineer and electrically transmits them over a fiber optics track, the new technology will save you going out to work, it will cut down on our enormous commuting problems, will take the pressure of our megalopolises, our military-industrial complex, and it will save enormous expenditures of fuel. So the argument goes.

For reasons I needn't go into here, I am not as sanguine as Toffler about this futuristic utopia. But I recognize the power of

Toffler's comforting myth. He argues that the Information Revolution will bring the nuclear family closer together again. The kids won't have to go out and drink beer on Saturday nights. They will be able to bring their friends home to watch video cassettes and MTV, restoring the "fireplace" to the heart (and hearth) of the American home. I'm not trying to be too satirical as I sketch out this futuristic design because Toffler and his technocratic utopia have been taken seriously, and much of their description is quite accurate. There will be fundamental changes in social organization. My argument with this heady vision is that it completely ignores the economic and political obstacles which stand in the way of Toffler's brave new world. Still, it was in response to the fascination with the computer revolution that I said to myself, "Wouldn't it be interesting to look at the way movies have rendered technology as a subject?" So I organized a two-semester course. The first semester begins with *Metropolis*, a Fritz Lang film, and comes up through Chaplin's *Modern Times* and Eisenstein's *The Old and the New*, then ends with the way recent science fiction has looked at the future in *Star Wars*, *Outland*, *Altered States*, and *Blade Runner*.

In the second semester we look at self-referential films and video, where the media technology becomes intended in the artist's design: the video installations of Nam June Paik at the Pompidou Center in Paris; the computer graphics revolution, including work done by James Blinn, for example, who designed educational simulations of the Voyager space probes; and some of the experimental work that shows up at annual SIGGRAPH exhibits. SIGGRAPH, as some of you know, stands for Special Interest Group for Computer Graphics, which now sponsors huge annual shows in major cities exhibiting everything from corporate pie-charts to major artists like Ed Emshwiller and David Em. The thrust behind these shows, which now draw upwards of 15,000 participants, is toward democratizing access to computer graphics systems. The point is that a terrific amount of discussion, propagandizing, and analysis of these new electronic media has influenced the way we think about modern imaging.

That, in a nutshell, is my third season. Screen *Fahrenheit 451* alongside a number of other films which came out at roughly the same time, Godard's *Alphaville* and Kubrick's *2001*, for instance, and

you begin to see technological terror from a very different perspective, seriously qualifying Toffler's rosy optimism. Here, anticipating Steve Lisberger's *Tron*, the computer becomes an arch villain. In *Tron* Master Control takes over the world of a video game from Dillinger, the human power-hungry antagonist, a cautionary emblem of the fear that computers will take over our entire civilization. *2001* has come a long way from Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, our most important utopian vision. The meaning of *2001*, in sharp contrast to Bellamy and Toffler, is that there is an inscrutable principle in the universe that cannot be discovered or penetrated by these high tech systems we are flinging like Thor's thunderbolts into outer space. It is a metaphysical, not a technological, idea.

Looked at in this way, *Fahrenheit 451* becomes a major statement about a technological future. Like *Alphaville* and *2001*, it is a cautionary fable saying that technology is powerful, it's attractive, it's hypnotic, it can be used to solve all kinds of human engineering problems, but beware! There are too many areas of human experience which technology leaves out. Technology can be used by totalitarian societies as much as it can be by industrial democracies. These films cast doubt on the idiot optimism which puts its faith in the notion that technology will save us, will create "a heaven right here on earth," to quote Gene Youngblood's last line in *Expanded Cinema*. That was my third season with Truffaut's film, another reason why for me the work seems as fresh now as in the year of its release.

If you study the way in which movies have looked at technology, you will find a profound ambivalence. On the one hand there's the tradition that comes down from *Looking Backward*. Bellamy was a very simple retiring journalist who lived most of his life in isolation in Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts. He got interested in the way industrial technology was mutilating the New England landscape. He was troubled by the tremendous amount of waste and inefficiency that was perpetrated by laissez-faire capitalism. So he dreamed up a future society through a novelistic gimmick about a character named Julian West, a young independently wealthy man about town, engaged to a beautiful young woman named Edith. Julian is living a very privileged life. He has one trouble — he is an insomniac. Because he can't sleep, he has built a steel-plated vault in the basement of his house. While he's down there one night in his cocoon, there is a fire

that destroys the top part of his house. Julian goes into a state of suspended animation for 100 years, protected by his vault. He wakes up in a kind of "lost horizon" society, discovered by a futuristic character named Dr. Leete. Dr. Leete is finally convinced that Julian is a fugitive from a primitive past and undertakes to re-educate him into the redemptive principles of the new age. What Julian sees around him is a beautifully ordered, rational, perfectly efficient, happy utopian society, much like the one Gene Youngblood and Alvin Toffler were to forecast in our own time. How did it come about? Men became reasonable instead of competitive. The planned market replaced the "free" market: instead of cut-throat competition, a rational assessment of needs; instead of profit, shared surplus value. Dr. Leete shows Julian an early version of custom tailoring. In *The Third Wave*, Toffler says that one of the nice things about having a computer at home is being able to order custom-tailored suits. Your screen will flash the kinds of fabric currently available, you will make your choice, punch up your size, the number and kind of buttons you want, statistics on your biceps, chest size, and waist, and a machine in Framingham will cut your suit according to prescription. Then the suit will be delivered to your home through some kind of pneumatic tube duct. The system will save all kinds of worry about overproducing "off the peg" inventories. This is the world of *Looking Backward*.

Utopian worlds assume that man can identify his problems; that he can bring reason to bear on those problems; that he can come up with rational solutions; that he can persuade the good citizens of his society to go along with this rational scheme because the solution is self-evident. Men will act in their own self-interest. So you don't need any laws. The lawyers are going to go broke. You don't need any police. You have a completely and benevolently controlled Shangri-la, much like Disney's EPCOT. These days, when you recount Bellamy's vision, it sounds naive to the point of absurdity. It's laughed out of court. If it survives at all, we see it in a minority of observers like B.F. Skinner, whose *Walden II* is a *rara avis*. But when Bellamy published *Looking Backward*, utopian fervor was in the air. Howard P. Segal, a historian of science at Harvard, just came out with a study called *Technological Utopianism in American Culture*. This is a review of twenty-five visionary schemes, including Edward Bellamy's, that appeared between 1883 and 1933. It includes the

futuristic blueprints of people like King Camp Gillette, the founder of of razor blade empire, who was equally known during his lifetime for drawing up beautiful diagrams of utopian habitats, dream-like cities which look like Pereira's urban planning models in California — breathtaking visions of ideal cities. Segal discovered that there were one hundred and forty such proposals to choose from, widely known and widely read.

The proliferation of utopian schemes seems astonishing to us now. We are the children of Kafka, brought up on futopian nightmares. I have several times taken a poll in my class: "How many of you think we're going to undergo a nuclear holocaust before the end of the century?" Seventy-five to eighty percent of my students consistently raise their hands. They think they're not going to live until the end of the century because of the world they see in *Fahrenheit 451*. I ask them, "How many of you think there is life on other planets?" Again, seventy-five to eighty percent will raise their hands. I press them: "*Why* do you think there is life on other planets?" Eventually, if we go deeply enough, we pry out the answer: because we've screwed up the planet and we need somebody wiser than we are to help. Our images by and large are futopian, sometimes called dystopian. *1984* is the book that our generation was raised on. George Orwell, as you know, was reappraised and rediscovered in 1984 during the anniversary of the publication of the book (1948). A flurry of articles showed how much of *1984* has turned out to be true and how much we have been spared, as though the book were a real blueprint of the future. When I discuss *1984* with my students, they say that blessedly a great deal of this terror has not eventuated for us, more perhaps in Red China and the Soviet Union. They feel it hasn't happened to us yet, but it could happen if we're not careful. Big Brother is looking down at us from those enlarged screens in Peking and Moscow. We may be next.

So we have seen how futopian images have replaced utopian optimism, and how *Fahrenheit 451* is a prime example of that transition. I'd like to stop here and entertain your questions.

When I picked up this book about a month ago, one of the things that I found interesting was that Bradbury also wrote The Illustrated

Man, The Martian Chronicles, *and several short stories that have been made into films. Why do you think Bradbury appeals to filmmakers?*

Well, if you look at science fiction in the thirties and forties, back issues of *Astounding Science Fiction*, for instance, I think it's fair to say they were not very well written. They were, in their genre, the literary equivalents of the dime-novel western and the dime-novel detective story. They were predictable, flat, conventional. Ray Bradbury stood out because he was one of the first elegant writers of science fiction. He was the best of the new breed that included Isaac Asimov, Harlan Ellison, Arthur C. Clarke, Frederick Pohl, and Philip K. Dick, among others. Bradbury created characters, he was interested in social issues, he was capable of writing the screenplay of *Moby Dick* for John Huston. Bradbury is adapted so often because he was one of the first to see the potentialities of science fiction as literature. He was to science fiction what Walter Van Tilburg Clark was to the western or Raymond Chandler to the detective story.

What has he been doing lately? He was hired by the Disney organization to work on EPCOT down in Orlando. He was excited by the assignment, like a kid with a new toy. And given his humanism it's not hard to see why. EPCOT is a utopian vision of the future. There is one pavilion where future habitats float in "air" bubbles like Buckminster Fuller predicted in *Spaceship Earth*. The ecology has been balanced and controlled. The seas have been mined for iodine-rich protein. Technology has brought temperature control and beautiful sound to House Beautiful. There's no politics. No struggle. No racial discrimination. No problems for women or blacks or Hispanics. It's a beautiful Bellamy-like vision of the future. Being able to write some of the scripts for that vision must have been very exhilarating to Bradbury. EPCOT holds up a comforting image of the future which Bradbury would very much like to believe himself. It's a temperament that's suited to a mass audience. If *Fahrenheit 451* expressed the dark side of Bradbury's vision, his work on EPCOT allowed him to express his optimism.

I've noticed that very often in a novel adaptation into film name

changes occur. Do you know why Montag's wife was called Linda in the movie and Mildred in the book?

Mildred isn't very euphonious. It doesn't sound good. Alterations like that are inevitable. One of the alterations I discuss in the *Film Quarterly* piece is the addition of Fabian. Fabian doesn't appear in the book, but in the film he is set up as a rival for the Captain's affection. Why? Well, I think there is a very erotic atmosphere among these macho men. I mean you can't look at the scene where the Captain says, "Something wrong between you and the pole, Montag?" and not see the phallic implications. Montag loses technological power as soon as he becomes human. Adding Fabian (Anton Diffring) as Montag's rival for the father's affection was a clever quiet detail that was typical of Truffaut. In the course of an adaptation, dozens of small changes like that are made by the director. Changing Mildred to Linda is one example among many.

After Truffaut's loving statement about the portrayal of books in the majority of the film, why was I so severely disappointed with the ending when the books are turned into people?

Well, that goes back to my first season with *Fahrenheit 451*. One of the reasons that critical reaction when the film first came out was, let us say, cautious, had to do with your question. Memorizing a book was too mechanical an image of surviving humanity. It's not a creative act. It's like reciting into a tape cassette and then playing it back. There's something machine-like about it, and people are disturbed by that. I think it is disturbing, but if you recall Annette Insdorf's discussion of that scene, you may see it in a slightly different way. I say that I haven't seen the same film twice. I admit that when I first saw it, in spite of the great care Truffaut took with those images, in spite of the beauty of the snow, I didn't like the scene. The books seem chosen at random, *Don Quixote* alongside *Pride and Prejudice*, a mish-mash of a library. There's a welter of references, everyone thrown in, all the okay guys who represent literature. But there's something else working in the scene. Truffaut talked about the *feel* of

the books and the *smell* of the leather binding that reminded him of his youth. I think we have become more responsive to the tactile quality of books as we start getting texts encoded on microfilm and teletext. A book loses something — that sensuous quality Truffaut is trying so hard to get in his ending. Because he was so careful to make the book burning seem like the incineration of human flesh, I find as I look at the film now — today, with you — that those talking books in the forest scene have a beauty I didn't feel was there the first time. I have to admit I was disappointed in spite of the settling snow. But for me repeated viewings have made the scene more resonant.

I perceive it a little differently. I think back to the oral tradition in literature. Not entirely, because the walking books are reciting by rote. But to me the scene goes back to the oral tradition, before printing.

That's a good point. There's a difference between the books walking through the woods, and the old man reciting Stevenson to the boy. The old man is like the village chieftain telling stories around the fireplace, transmitting them orally. Truffaut went to some pains to let you know what it is like to live in a world without printed language. That's why he recites (instead of the usual printing) the credits at the beginning over the shots of TV aerials. That's why there are no words, no posters in the school scene. There are no newspapers in the house. The comic strips don't have balloons. Printed language doesn't exist for Montag until he picks up *David Copperfield.*

The only thing that maybe chilled me a little bit, and I don't know if it was intentional in this spot or not, was the distance between the people. They're very cordial to one another. It's a nice reasonable type of society and much, much better than what they are leaving, but at the same time they're going through sort of a dark age.

It sounds very presumptuous, but that's why I still disagree with Truffaut about leaving out the buttercup image. If one felt that their

love had survived — and I don't think it's being sentimental or romantic — if one felt that the human relationships were being preserved along with the books, then I think you wouldn't have that uneasy feeling. It was a mistake because I think Truffaut was fighting his own instincts. I think Oskar Werner was right.

When I read the novel, Clarisse seemed like fifteen years old. She was seventeen, but an immature seventeen, and I don't remember Montag having a love relationship with her.

No. As far as it gets is that little gesture of rubbing the buttercup on one's chin. Montag rubs it on his chin and the color does come off. Nothing is done with this scene, but I think you're meant to feel that Montag has fallen in love with Clarisse. It's a beautiful moment, and I think it would have enhanced the final scene, made the walking books seem a little less mechanical. In any case it's absolutely consistent with Truffaut's general feeling about men and women in his best work.

In futopian films, is the retreat back to a kind of primitivism characteristic of escape from the over-technological age, and if it is, do any of the films talk about re-making man? It seems to me that in Bradbury novels, what you're dealing with is not man bound or enslaved by technology, but man enslaved to his vices and follies, man using technology to continually entrap himself. So that it's not the technocrat, it's just the human being. The tragedy lies within us. I'm wondering if maybe that's why the Marxists object so much to dystopias like 1984. *Because even if you liberate Montag and Clarisse, if they begin to live as social animals, will they not again repeat the same mistakes that their society has made unless they are fundamentally changed human beings?*

The answer is that futopias in the end leave no escape hatch. They don't believe that human personality can be transformed or that there's even a way out along the railroad tracks. They get much

bleaker than that. One of the most interesting examples of this vision appears in George Lucas' first film, *THX-1138*, one of the most uncompromising futopias in recent motion picture history. Maybe eighteen people saw it. Audiences didn't want to hear it. Robert Duvall does climb up a ladder at the end, leaving this sterile, antiseptic world where everyone's had is shaved, sexuality repressed even more ruthlessly than in *1984*. The totalitarian hold is absolute. This was Lucas' first instinct. THX-1138 does escape at the end, but there's a very ambivalent image of him standing up against a huge burning orange sun, and you're not sure of there's life beyond the rim of this underground city or a dead end. Lucas deliberately leaves it ambiguous. You're not sure if THX-1138 has any future.

The answer to your question seems to me that man cannot be redone, can't be transmuted: there is no place for him to escape. That's why I said it's such a bleak image. When Lucas saw which way the wind was blowing, he said, "The hell with it. I'm not going to make movies that are going to be seen by eighteen people. I'll be an entertainer. I'll make a fairy tale." And he very brilliantly and cunningly came up with *Star Wars*, which reverses all the assumptions of *THX-1138*. *Star Wars* hit a nerve. It reprocessed a number of old folk legends. It is absolutely consoling because it tells the youth audience that God, "The Force," is on their side. Darth Vader is clearly evil, Luke Skywalker is unambiguously good, and good always wins out. Our heroes will escape from the Death Star in Hans Solo's Milennium Falcon. Our heroes can overcome the villain's technology with a blessed technology of their own because their neon sabre swords have been sanctified by "The Force." After Darth Vader is defeated they can move freely through space in defense of the Republic.

On the other hand, I wouldn't say that in Lucas' fable human beings can be transmuted in your sense of the term. Because there's not a human being in *Star Wars*. These are comic strip cut-outs who work very effectively within their own world, but cannot sustain the test of psychological complexity. They are two-dimensional caricatures. Of course, you have a very interesting subtext in the story's father/son relationship: Darth Vader in the third film of the trilogy turns out to be Luke Skywalker's father. I was mulling this over the other day, trying to recall examples from folk literature or fairy tales

where the hero turns out to be the son of the satanic enemy. I couldn't think of any. If I think about it some more, I may be able to figure out why this symbiotic relationship has a special modern meaning for us — because it's very unusual — and why millions of kids all over the world, regardless of culture, have responded so enormously to it. I suspect the solution lies in the profound guilt that seems to me buried at the heart of *Star Wars*, Christ as Satan's son. But the simple answer to your question — and it's a very good one — is that there is no escape hatch from the infernal city and no assumption that humanity can be altered.

I was thinking of those bleak post-atomic war films where you get the hero fighting for survival but with no suggestion of progress being made.

You're thinking of *Mad Max* and *Road Warrior*. I do think that George Miller works in the futopian tradition because he shows human nature, tribal gangs at their most vicious, human conduct at its nastiest, habitats and social organization at their bleakest, just like *THX-1138*. That's why we want E.T. to come down and save us.

Wouldn't you say that Fahrenheit 451 *does have an escape hatch?*

It does have an escape hatch, we have already seen that. But it's primarily a futopian vision vision because even though Montag can turn his flame-thrower on the Captain and kill that one man, the institution is going to endure. So Montag has to leave. There is no sense that he can change things from within.

But at the end of Fahrenheit 451 *there is a strong sense that the book-lovers will endure and even spread that humanistic culture.*

I see that as a sort of anachronistic residue within the total

structure. If there is an alternative, it's in setting up a little commune, a manageable group of people out there in the wilderness, away from urban centers, away from the technological goliath. As you say, Marxists don't like that vision because there's no hope that revolutionary struggle can alter the superstructure — which is after all the basic tenet of Marxism. The movie's vision is the vision of Kropotkin, of the anarchists. It represents a wish, a different alternative, but leaves the central power structure in place. People who defend *1984*'s bleak vision say Orwell didn't mean it literally, it's more cautionary tale than prophecy. This is the kind of thing that might happen if we let state control run amok. But I think Orwell meant it, and so do Truffaut and Bradbury. The fact is, the only way you can survive is in this little breathing hole which leaves the totalitarian city intact.

What I'm trying to do is describe two different modes — the Bellamy mode, which arrives at a time when everything was possible and progress was taken for granted and the resources of the country seemed unlimited, and the Orwellian mode, which cries out against the totalitarian nightmare. The breathing holes are important. They're better than nothing. But I do think they alter the fundamental imaginative commitment to the futopian vision among modern-day Cassandras who think they are describing reality. The striking thing is how comfortably that vision can co-exist with the wish-fulfillment of *Star Wars*. I think it would be interesting to have a filmmaker come along and begin his movie with Truffaut's ending, with the community along the railroad tracks. Could he imagine an alternative society which can survive, make sense, and is not ruthlessly oppressive? Could he make credible the wish expressed in Alvin Toffler's *Third Wave*, in Gene Youngblood's *Expanded Cinema*, in Bucky Fuller? It seems virtually impossible for a filmmaker these days to imagine a lasting, believable community coming out of those raggle-taggle books along the railroad tracks. I don't pretend to like this impasse. I'm simply trying to understand what's going on imaginatively in clusters of films like this. I think it's an enormous contradiction to have both *Star Wars* and *Fahrenheit 451*, *E.T.* and *Blade Runner* co-existing on the same planet. And if contradiction, like humor and possibility and openness and snow, is a sign of enduring humanity, then we're still safe for a few more years.